

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

## Digitalizing rural areas: a traditional context

To cite this article: K Olkhovikov *et al* 2021 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Earth Environ. Sci.* **699** 012047

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.

 <p><b>The Electrochemical Society</b> Advancing solid state &amp; electrochemical science &amp; technology 2021 Virtual Education</p> <p><b>Fundamentals of Electrochemistry:</b> Basic Theory and Kinetic Methods Instructed by: <b>Dr. James Noël</b> Sun, Sept 19 &amp; Mon, Sept 20 at 12h–15h ET</p> <p><b>Register early and save!</b></p>	
--	--

# Digitalizing rural areas: a traditional context

K Olkhovikov<sup>1</sup>, A Korobeynikov<sup>1</sup>, E Zarubina<sup>2</sup>, L Zhuravleva<sup>2</sup> and A Ruchkin<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

<sup>2</sup> Ural State Agrarian University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

\* E-mail: alexeyruchkin87@gmail.com

**Abstract.** Digitalizing the existing territories is widely declared and procreated in the modern world. The process has become widespread in developed countries and is gaining momentum in developing countries; also attracting a lot of studies in economics, technology, and political science. We argue the necessity of philosophical attitude to cope with the essentials of digitalization. Mostly, the use of philosophy in the matter comes with aspects usually ignored in quantitative methodologies. Actual qualitative reference of unfolding digital nets for rural territories, still representing numerous semantics of a traditional life-world, helps bringing to the limelight opportunities overlooked in intensive indicators and their capacity to describe the actual social and cultural process involved in territorial digitalization.

## 1. Introduction

Many areas of human life are undergoing changes due to technological innovations being introduced, and the real space of a person is also changing, not only his areas of hobbies and everyday practices of human characters. The wonderful world is trying to spread to where it can reach, which means it is time to talk about digitalization of the countryside. Indeed, for the most part, it is the urban environment, the *technos* environment that was previously perceived as an environment for digitalization, but as Robert Weidui, CEO of Khemia Consulting, rightly notes: "Technology is really about people, not about hardware or software" The epic of digitalization is about people, and specific geographical and spatial references do not matter overwhelmingly, which is why you should not perceive the digitalization of rural areas as something unusual. The process of digitalization that began in an urbanized environment simply took time to move beyond it – to villages, and suburbs. Obviously, "Taking into consideration Industry 4.0, it is expected that over the next 10 years there will be dramatic changes in the agri-food system, driven by advanced digital technologies and innovations (blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Immerse Reality, etc.), changing consumer preferences and demands, the influence of e-commerce on global agri-food trade, climate changes and other factors." [1; p.1]

The fatality and absurdity of digitalization, initially born for efficiency, is that it is produced by a person, at the expense of a person and the one for whom all that is also produced by a person. The figure interferes with the space of human existence only to "improve the level and quality of life".

We could recall a digitalization concerning human knowledge and skills, in a word, human competencies, but we could see this only therefore to manifest changes in human thinking, attitude and being. These aspects are the key, while the order and areas of digitalization are just details, because the goal of the digital world is a person, the human character alive. Three aspects of human personality – "to think", "to love", "to be" - constitute human nature for god, or at least, are expected to. A familiar



person, such as we know one, in the face of digitalization risks losing one's ontological status and disappear into oblivion, dissolving oneself in the ephemerality of the digital space. This reminds of Arnold Toynbee words, "Civilizations die from suicide, not by murder" [2].

The world has already experienced many revolutionary changes, usually involving technology and culture, but none of these revolutions have encroached on the person himself. The great Russian philologist and cultural critic Dmitry Likhachev once observed that "Russian spirituality is preserved in the province" [3; p. 201]. This is true not only to Russian spirituality, but to spirituality *per se*. City is an abnormal habitat for a human being. The city deprives people of the 'natural' being status, and therefore produces mortal challenges for a healthy normal feeling and emotional identity. We can describe city as a more pathogenic environment due to its poor ecology, nutrition, stress levels, and man-made hazards, still there are deeper motives and reasons behind the calamities. We face the fact that the countryside in the modern world is the last bastion of tradition. And today we see *technos* storming this bastion of tradition through digitalization. "*Digit*" tries to triumph over the human body, spirit, and soul, and not over some territory, space or natural resource, is the game over?

## 2. Facing the digitality in the country

The battle of "digital" for the right to bring comfort, convenience, and security to humanity in a brave new world is not accidental. The departure of modern society from tradition, nature and common sense could not entail anything other than the approach of artificiality, instability, and unexpected variability, contrary to all tradition. This opposition between tradition and post-tradition is particularly evident in the unfolding rural digitalization, especially when an unexpected comeback of humanity arrives.

The "confrontation between city and village" was previously almost an archetypal embodiment of the struggle between innovation and tradition, modernism, and conservatism, but now the story has developed – the digital world establishes itself outside the urban environment. 'Apologists' of digitalization try to convince the public of its urgent necessity, referring to the modern nature of the global economy, the inevitability of progress (is the process initiated and executed by the person himself so inevitable?), global trends, economic and technological expediency, but each time they ignore the key question about the essence and nature of man, true needs and the purpose of technology. Do technologies serve man, or does man serve technological progress? Judging by the prescribed triumph of digitalization, people should be in a subordinate position. *However, the traditional life world is capable of 'fighting back' the technological intrusion, and especially with the help of digitalizing tools.*

Manuel Castells clearly argues: "On the social side, there is a trend for social relationships to be characterized simultaneously by two processes: individuation (not individualization but the building of meaning vis-a`-vis the individual project) and communalism. Both processes use spatial patterning and online communication. Individuation is both spatial and virtual: physical proximity and online connectivity. The same applies to communalism: virtual communities and physical communities develop in close interaction" [4; p. 550]

The main factor and object of digitalization is the person, and if so, it is necessary to pay attention to the integral state of the person during this process. It is the impact on people, not on the economy, politics, or any other sphere that should primarily concern supporters of digitalization. Although we can guess and judge the true motives and goals of the supporters of digitalization, we may leave them aside, since these aspects require special analysis. Anyway, ignoring the anthropological measurement, the digitalization is doomed to a marketing failure.

We are told about positive aspects of digitalization, it is characterized exclusively as a good moment in the history of progress, which has tremendous prospects and brings a lot of opportunities for humanity. At the same time, there is a lack of discussion, touching dangers, risks, and possible negative changes that the digitalization process brings with it. At the same time, the digital sphere is increasingly identified with a global organism endowed with reason, attempts are being made to humanize it, while man, on the contrary, is being reduced to the level of a social phenomenon, an atom

of social relations – all these are also characteristics and important features that illustrate the process of digital transformation. But the main questions again remains ignored: how can a full-fledged human personality be integrated into digital reality? How can the machine mind evaluate and judge human behavior and consciousness? What is the place of free will and humanity in the digital world? How will the machine see a person through the prism of "digital"? And what will be the place of the familiar aspects of the human soul and spirit in the new reality? And the answers to these questions go far beyond the Turing's test or criticism of Searle's "Chinese room" experiment [5].

### **3. Digital tools of traditionality**

Tradition allows us to judge and look for means to compensate the catastrophic gap between the future and the real world, which is not scarce of common sense metaphysics. Although this gap grows incessantly, but traditional questions touching the essence of a person, human personality, questions of spirituality and humanity in the actual pragmatic sense, are persuasive through appropriating the digitalization of quotidian practices, which could not be equalized to an anachronism or being reduced to the role of decorative attributes that do not matter when it comes to the future world, to the digital future of our daily life in the country. The fact is that in the modern world of post-tradition, the countryside is becoming not just a phenomenon with a territorial dimension, but first, a cultural dimension. The spirituality in the province is a phenomenon not for good. The postmodern space does not provide the one for traditional values, targeting to deprive them of their property, or even getting rid of them, dubbing them excessive prejudices. Digitalization will sharpen the image of a countryside as "safe haven" for traditionalism, thanks to the unification and standardization of behavioral norms and life practices. The global digital Babylon that becomes a product of digitalization is a supranational and extra-geographical phenomenon that fully embodies the mixing of peoples, cultures and meanings, by the way, reiterating the human lifeworld in daily practices reflecting the cultural universalia, the universal humanity values.

The countryside today is an attempt to preserve the tradition, existential meanings, and ontological foundations of human existence in a form that is ignored by postmodernism. We do not idealize the countryside at all, realizing the sufferings in this global departure of civilization from tradition and the once familiar world. A village and suburb today are not the same village and suburb like 100, 50 or even 20 years ago. The world is changing too fast and has gone too far in the change. There is a popular expression "To stay in place in the modern world, you need to run", which characterizes the rapid changes in everyday life, the necessity of rapid "races in the wheel" - and even this expression loses its meaning in the digital world of the future. "To simply be in the digital world, you need to stop being a person for the sake of the humanity" - this is the probable paradigm of the future. This is the "necessity" to which the 'apologists' of digitalization are gradually bringing humanity, without yet voicing it, calling it "one of the stages of conscious evolution". A person, parting with tradition from the outside, inevitably loses it inside oneself. Definitely, "The growing interest of corporate media for Internet-based forms of communication recognizes the significance of the rise of a new form of societal communication, the one I have conceptualized as mass self-communication." [6, p. XXX] These steps towards post-man have brought our society to the equivocal process, forming partly the digitalization of rural areas. Really, "In connection with the societal debates on environmental issues and sustainability, it has been realized that agriculture has, or can have, many more functions than producing food and non-food plant or animal products. Farmers may or may not 'produce' clean air, a beautiful landscape, biodiversity, attractive space for recreation, clean water, a healthy soil, animal welfare. In other words, there can be many things that farmers 'produce' for which they are not directly rewarded in financial terms." [7; p. 8]

### **4. Conclusion**

It is obvious that humanity is ready for new non-economic means for survival, but even more obvious is the lack of understanding in a society that embraces the post-consumeristic reflexive critique alongside mechanical stereotypes of progressive life-world colonization. The equivocal nature of

digitalizing the existing countryside opens up some exclusive opportunities that do not lie on the surface of digital efficiency for communication as such, still reviving the human chances for self-identity in a somewhat ‘compressed’ globality. Sorokin and Habermas share the point of distinctiveness in advocating the hiatuses in mechanic rationality as a human advantage, which is absolutely true in digital reality.

## References

- [1] Trendov N, Varas S and Zeng M 2018 Digital technologies in agriculture and rural areas status report, <http://www.fao.org/>
- [2] Toynbee A 1974 A study of history, Dell publishing Co., <https://discoversocialsciences.files.wordpress.com/>
- [3] Likhachev D 2000 Russian culture, Art (Moscow: Lihachev) <https://www.lihachev.ru/>
- [4] Castells M Local and Global: Cities in the Network Society. Department of City and Regional Planning, University of California (Los Angeles: University of California) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>
- [5] Turing test, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 2011, <https://en.wikipedia.org/>
- [6] Castells M 2010 The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture **1** The Rise of the Network Society (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication) <https://deterritorialinvestigations.files.wordpress.com/>
- [7] Leeuwis C 1988 Communication for Rural Innovation. Rethinking Agricultural Extension 3 Blackwell Science Ltd